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TRANSLATING ROMANIAN POETRY INTO SPANISH

1. TRANSLATING POETRY: SOME GENERAL ISSUES

I don't intend to revisit all the principles of traductology, since that would not be of much use in this context, yet I would like to come across some of the „questions" concerning poetic translation. Therefore, I am going to examine some of the most common places regarding this topic, and how a translator may deal with them.

a) It is frequent to hear people say that the work of a translator does not only consist in passing the meaning of the poem from one language into another, but to respect its „spirit". I disagree with this recurring idea because the notion of „spirit" is a fade one, what's the spirit of a poem or the soul of it? A translator has to respect the meaning of the literary work in the first place and then, he or she has to try and rewrite it in a different language, respecting its structure and making it easy to understand for a potential reader.

b) A translator has to stay close to the poem. One must read the verses over and over again until the words become familiar. By doing this, a translator is supposed to become the best possible reader, to feel the rhythm of the poem. This rhythm and the figures of speech are indeed the true „spirit" of the poem.

c) Is it worth knowing the poet? If you get lucky and you have the chance or the responsibility of translating a living author, it doesn't have to be a good idea to write to him/her. A translator doesn't need to get to know the poet, although it can help in case linguistic doubts come up. It is not worth knowing what the poet was thinking when he/she was writing the poem in the source language: now the translator is the poet in the target language, so that's what really matters.

When a poem is translated, the translator's duty is to stay as close to the meaning as possible. That said, one has the artistic „license" to use (not abuse) the original meaning in order to make a clearer translation. We want readers in the

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DACOROMANIA, serie nouă, XVII, 2012, nr. 2, p. 191–198

target language to enjoy the poem, we don't want them to look at how well we can directly translate words. Let's avoid *mot-à-mot* translations which readers wouldn't appreciate and that never catch the whole meaning of the text.

These facts make it infinitely difficult to pin down the precise literal meaning of any text of any complexity. This difficulty is still further compounded by the fact that literal meanings supported by a consensus of semantic conventions are not the only types of meaning that can function in a text and nuance its interpretations. (Hérvey, Higgins 1992, p. 88)

e) One may think that translating a poem is a lot like writing a poem yourself. You have to know what you want to say, or at least, you have to try. You have to „feel" what you want to write. I don't agree with this thought. The translator is not, in this view, an artist equal to the original poet. He or she is a tool to bring the original text closer to the readers in their language, but he or she should not try to outstrip the author, even if a re-stylisation is sometimes needed.

From the original author we expect an artistic stylization of reality, and from the translator we expect an artistic re-stylization of the source. Translators can most readily apply their talent to linguistic stylization, so the gift of style is what they need above all. (Levý 2011, p. 47)

f) The beauty of a poem is not only achieved by thee choice of words and figurative language like in novels and short stories, but also with the creation of rhythm, rhyme, meter and other structures belonging to poetic language that may not conform to the ones of the common life language. In short, the translation of poetry needs a different effort from the one we need when translating other literary genres.

g) One of the classical methods of translation, the metrical translation, emphasizes the reproduction of the original meter into the target language. We don't agree with it because each language has its own specific stressing and pronunciation system; this method would result, thus, in an inappropriate translation, what to do with languages such as Chinese or Korean? They need fewer syllables than Spanish or Italian, so we should adjust to the meaning and forget the meter.

h) Another method is the so called „free verse translation". Thanks to this method the translator may be able to get accurate semantic equivalents in the target language. On the other hand, the rhyme and meter are usually ignored, actually, they have to be. So, physically, the result is different from the original but the meaning would look roughly the same. As Jiři Levý would say, it is nearly a miracle that a translator can keep the rhyme, even in a couple of verses: „The poetry translator usually considers it an achievement if at least one rhyme pair can be found to represent the meanings contained in the two lines of the original" (Levý 2011, p. 193). We think that, if rhyme is not the goal to achieve for the whole text, a translator should not care about it, not even in a couple of verses.

i) I don't personally think that poetry is uniquely tied to its original language. It is true that, thanks to the poetic function of the language, a poem is supposed to

carry a greater meaning for the speakers of the language in which it was written; however, a foreign language translation of the poem changes its words but it does not change the poem itself. A translation is an adaptation, and adaptations differ from their originals, that's a natural fact.

To sum up my ideas on the matter, I have tried to rephrase what I think is the role played by translators when they face a poetic translation. In the first place, the translator's primary responsibility should be to make a poem which, in spite of being the adaptation of a text that already exists in a different language, takes its own place in the poetic tradition of the target language. The translator, in this sense, crosses linguistic and cultural barriers in order to create a parallel poem. To accomplish the task of creating a „twin" poem, the translator searches for equivalents which will ensure that the translation is „true" to the original. These don't have to be literal equivalents as we saw before, the translator's skills have to make sure that the new translation has its own identity and does not „sound" like a sheer copy of the original.

2. TRANSLATING ROMANIAN LITERATURE IN SPAIN

As it is the case with other Eastern European literatures, the presence of Romanian literature in Spain remains, nowadays, in a low position. The fact that many Romanian citizens have come to work to Spain is changing this trend, since Romania looks now closer to Spain as it ever was, and the funding from the Romanian Cultural Institute (*Institutul Cultural Român*) may help to increase the weight of Romanian literature in the Spanish literary market. The best sold foreign books in Spain are usually translated from English or French, with the exception of detective books coming from Sweden, Denmark or even Iceland, that are now a sales phenomenon in Spanish bookshops.

What Romanian books have been translated so far? Not many actually. Some of the major names in the history of Romanian literature are available in Spanish, such as Eminescu or Alecsandri. Sometimes we can clearly see that the originals were not in Romanian but in French, like Rafael Alberti and Maria Teresa Leon's translation of some poems by Eminescu. The main names of the 20th century, such as Mircea Eliade, Norman Manea or Mihai Sebastian have been recently translated into Spanish. In many cases we have to thank Joaquín Garrigós for that. Former director of Instituto Cervantes in Bucharest, Garrigós is the author of a good deal of translations, he has played a very important role in the diffusion of Romanian literature in the Spanish-speaking world.

Nowadays contemporary Romanian authors like Dan Lungu, Filip Florian, Ana Blandiana or Mircea Cărtărescu are available in Spanish. The most important problem that Romanian literature has to overcome now, not only in Spain but in other European markets, is the label of being a „minor" or even an „exotic" literature, in order to be compared equally to any other European literature, also in terms of translation.

3. SOME LINGUISTIC ISSUES ROMANIAN – SPANISH

In spite of the fact that both Romanian and Spanish are Romance languages and their structural differences are not huge, there are some important grammar facts that we have to take into account when translating from Romanian into Spanish. First of all, the place of the definite article is different. We have a postponed article in Romanian: *om* ‘person’ > *omul* ‘the person’; this feature gives the language, in my opinion, a particular rhythm that can get lost in a translation since the place of that article in Spanish is different. Closely related to this point we have the position of possessives and demonstratives: *casa mea* ‘my house’ would be „*mi casa*”, and so on.

	RO	ES	EN
Definite article	*poemul*	el poema	‘the poem’
Possessive adjective	*ţara mea*	mi país	‘my country’
Demonstratives	*femeia aceasta*	esta mujer	‘this woman’

Other facts that should be taken into account are related to the existence of a declension in Romanian which means that words in the genitive or dative cases may appear, a fact that make things complicated for a translator when dealing with a poem. A phrase like *începutul vieţii mele*, ‘the beginning of my life’, would be in Spanish something like „*el comienzo de mi vida*”.

	RO	ES	EN
Gen.	*conţinutul poemului*	el contenido del poema	‘the content of the poem’
Dat.	*capitala ţării mele*	la capital de mi país	‘the capital city of my country’

When it comes to Romanian verbs, one of the most particular features of Romanian language is the use of gerunds in a subordinate clause, meaning generally cause or simultaneity. Well, the use of this tense in Spanish is far more restricted so the translator has to avoid it and make a whole clause instead. The consequence of this will be, at least, a longer sentence, whose meaning will not be exactly the same as the gerund’s meaning in Romanian. The other tenses don’t pose so many problems since they all come from the Latin verbal system, more or less maintained in every Romance language with some differences that won’t affect the result of a translation if the original text is well understood.

4. ANALYSIS OF SOME OF THE MAIN DIFFICULTIES A POETIC TRANSLATOR MAY ENCOUNTER

We will go through some of the main difficulties that a translator may come across with when dealing with a poetic translation. The list doesn’t intend to be

thorough, but one based in my own experience translating *Dublu CD*, by Mircea Cărtărescu. The examples given in the following lines belong to that book.

a) **Place names**

Problem: How to put into the target language the names of streets, parks, areas of the city...

Solution: We respect the proper name, but we translate the common name. In the special case of Calea Victoriei, we suggest respecting the Romanian phrase, since it is significant enough and the result of such a translation in Spanish would be confusing. We agree then with what Peter Newmark says about translating proper names:

Proper names are a translation difficulty in any text. In literature it has to be determined whether the name is real or invented. In nonliterary texts, translators have to ask themselves what if any additional explanatory or classificatory information has to be supplied for the TL readership (Newmark 1993, p. 15).

RO	ES	EN
Poligonul Cățelu	el Polígono Cățelu	
Calea Victoriei	**Calea Victoriei**/la Calle de la Victoria	'Victoria Street'

b) **Equivalents**

Problem: What to do when a word has no direct translation into the target language.

Solution: The translator has to look for an equivalent, a word that allows the poem to be coherent in the target language. We must avoid too long explanations, even if that modifies the original meaning.

RO	ES	EN
totul **graseia**	todo era **gangoso**	gangoso: 'nasal'
atât **je m'enfichism**	tanto **pasotismo**	pasota: 'someone who doesn't give a damn about anything'

c) **Tenses**

Problem: What can a translator do when a tense in the source language can have several meanings and, therefore, several different possible translations?

Solution: We try to figure out the „time line", taking into account the verbal aspect, and to make a grammatically correct sentence in the target language.

RO	ES	EN
cine **a râs** ca o bețivancă?	żquién **reía** / rió / ha reído como una borracha?	'used to laugh'

d) **Gerunds**

Problem: How can we translate Romanian gerunds into Spanish? This construction is widely spread in literary Romanian, not in Spanish, where the use of gerunds, as we saw, is restricted and has got fewer meanings.

Solution: The translator has to „discover” the meaning of the gerund in every case and try to find a construction that keeps the same meaning in the target language: either a relative clause, a time clause, etc. The gerund may stay if it is grammatically possible in Spanish.

RO	ES	EN
cine trăieşte senzația de vertigo, **văzând și pipăind** nu cu văzul...	żquién vive la sensación de vértigo, **mientras ve y palpa**, no con la mirada...?	mientras: ‘while’
shopuri **întorcându-se** după soare	*shops* **que giran** alrededor del sol	‘that turn’ relative clause
patru cai vor galopa ... **sângerând** prin crânguri	Cuatro caballos galoparán … **sangrando** por los matorrales	‘bleeding’

e) Colloquial language

Problem: What can a translator do when confronted to slang or colloquial expressions?

Solution: A colloquial equivalent in the target language is required, even if that doesn’t mean exactly the same thing. Peter Newmark considers that slang is related rather to the present than to the past, so the translator has to be careful not to „mix” expressions from the present in a text from the 19th century or earlier.

In principle, the translator uses the modern language in the appropriate register, whatever the period when the original was written. However, slang in general, and some idioms are so closely related to the present, linguistically rather than culturally, that they sound bizarre when used in translations of texts of a previous period. (Newmark 1993, p. 74)

RO	ES	EN
ce ai, ești **supă**?	żqué te pasa, estás **mosca**?	‘what’s up? are you annoyed?’
când vroiai **să faci mișto**	cuando querías **tomarme el pelo**	‘when you wanted to pull my leg’

f) **Puns**

Problem: Can we translate what appears to be just a game of words in the source language?

Solution: We can respect the author's intention by finding another game into the target language, even if can sometimes lose a part of that game.

RO	ES	EN
să ne iubim, **unamuno, nebuno**	querámonos, **unamuno, una y uno**	The vocative 'nebuno' has to be replaced to keep an internal rhyme
coasta ta de fildeș pe **coasta ta de azur**	tu **costa de marfil** con tu **costa azul**	The author plays with the meaning of *coasta*, both 'coast' and 'rib'

g) Grammar differences

Problem: How do we translate grammar elements that don't exist as such in the target language? For instance adverbs like *iată* or *hai*, or dative pronouns in a possessive construction.

Solution: We translate according to the meaning even if that implies the length of the sentence.

RO	ES	EN
și **iată** cum	y **mira tú** cómo	mira 'look'
când **îți aud vocea** la telefon	cuando **escucho tu voz** por teléfono	'when I hear your voice'

5. CONCLUSIONS

We have to bear in mind that the reader of a translation is not reading the original poem, of course, however, that doesn't mean that he or she is not reading a good version of that poem. The translation may be closely related to the original text and it may be as beautiful – how subjective this adjective is! – but it has to be something different, and both the translator and the reader have to be aware of this fact. This should be the main part of the „contract" a reader implicitly signs when he or she decides to read foreign poetry translated into his/her own language. A reader would grasp the meaning of a poem, enjoy the beauty of words but there will certainly be something missing, and that is an „a priori" they should not forget. A translator's work is neither perfect nor imperfect, it is something different. His primary duty is to the new poem which, through the process of translation, „becomes" the translator's poem and not just a transliteration of the original poet's work. Ideas on translation evolve and we have to keep always open to new trends, so this pages you have just read are not an unchangeable manifesto.

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Abstract

In this paper we aim to approach the world of translating Romanian poetry into Spanish, first of all, by having a quick look at the main issues that arise when translating poetry in any language, and then, by analyzing what specific problems a translator may find when translating from one Romance language, in this case Romanian, into another, Spanish.

Keywords: *Romanian poetry, translation problems, Spanish, Romanian*.

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